

Learn the Issues: Childcare

*Adapted from the Rethink Childcare Campaign at <http://rethinkchildcare.ca/learn/>

Young families are squeezed on all sides. Today's young mothers and fathers need to work harder and longer than did their parents, while erosion of Canada's social safety net has left them struggling to survive.

Young families, including newcomers to Canada and Aboriginal families (who experience Canada's most extreme inequality) need good family policy, but especially childcare. Child care enables parents to get the education/training they need to access good jobs and should allow mothers and fathers to work without enduring years-long child care wait lists or breaking the family budget. Child care makes it more possible for low income or sole support parents (who are mostly women) to take advantage of opportunities for advancement. At the same time, all parents can better balance work and family if they can be confident that their children are safe, thriving and happy.

Well-supported families and communities need to have support for parents to work or study, ensure struggling families have adequate resources to raise children. We need community spaces where families can actively participate. This is made possible by well designed, well integrated high quality child care programs.

- Almost 70 per cent of mothers with children under five are working. Yet Canada lacks a national child care system.
- There are only enough regulated spaces for about 19 per cent of children aged zero to 12. It's even harder to find spaces for infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, Aboriginal and rural children.
- For many families, child care is the second highest expense after housing. In Ontario, families can pay between \$40 and \$60 a day for care. In big cities, the cost is higher.
- In most of Canada, child care subsidies are hard to come by or are designed so that even low income parents have to cover high out-of-pocket costs. In Toronto, more than 22 000 eligible families are on the subsidy waiting list on any given day. Many of these families will never reach the top of the list.
- For-profit child care provides 28 per cent of spaces in Canada, and is growing at an alarming rate.
- Research shows that for-profit child care – whether small, individually-owned centres, chains or the growing Big Box sector – is unlikely to provide the high quality care children need.
- Quality depends on well-trained, fairly paid staff, yet early childhood educators in Canada earn 55 per cent of the wages of comparably educated workers. Many leave the sector altogether.
- Research has shown that Quebec's investment in its seven dollar a day child care program has more than paid for itself through mothers' annual income and consumption taxes.

- Quebec's child care program increased the number of women in the workforce by 3.8 per cent, pumping an additional \$5.2 billion into the Quebec economy and boosting the province's gross domestic product by 1.7 per cent.

One of Stephen Harper's first acts in power was to cancel agreements with the provinces and territories for early learning and care and cut \$1 billion in funding. He replaced it with a monthly payment directly to parents – an amount that barely covers a couple of nights of babysitting. It's time the federal government recognized that investing in quality early learning and care would reduce poverty, increase employment and stimulate the economy. It's time to rethink child care.